

## Book Review

Robert S. Ross, Øystein Tunsjø and Zhang Tuosheng, eds (2010)

### *US–China–EU Relations: Managing the New World Order*

Abingdon: Routledge

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Salvatore Finamore

*University of Cambridge*

Faced with the decline of unipolarity and the rise of new global powers, scholars have devoted much energy in recent years to the effort of drawing scenarios on the nature and characteristics of an emerging new world order. Because of the sheer size of their military, economic and political power, the United States, China and the European Union stand out as perhaps the most obvious candidates to hold key roles in shaping the future of the international system. The main argument put forward by Robert Ross, Øystein Tunsjø and Zhang Tuosheng in editing *US–China–EU Relations* is that the interactions between these three power centres and their “converging and diverging views (...) of the international order” will be crucial in determining the nature of international relations in the years to come.

The volume is a collection of essays written by some of the most reputed scholars in the field, ensuring a wide representation of both Chinese and Western views. The key theme through which the editors try to bring together this wealth of material is the notion of ‘diplomatic triangle’, with a strong emphasis on the word ‘diplomatic’. According to their view, the US–China–EU triangle differs from triangular relationships of the past, such as the ‘strategic triangle’ connecting the United States, the Soviet Union and China. A ‘diplomatic triangle’ is one that incorporates elements of both cooperation and competition and which – unlike the Cold War ‘strategic triangle’ – is not characterised exclusively as a zero-sum game, but rather allows for absolute gains and collective efforts in facing international problems.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part consists of three chapters – written respectively by Robert Art, Zhang Tuosheng and Hanns Maull – discussing American, Chinese and European preferences and conceptualisations of the international system. Art’s chapter is particularly interesting insofar as it relates US particular interests and preferences for the future of world order to those held by the other two actors. Zhang and Maull, on the other hand, deal more exclusively with China and Europe, the former by outlining China’s vision of a ‘harmonious world’ and the latter by focusing on the European Union as a civilian power striving to promote a shift to a ‘civilised’ international order. The main picture emerging from these three chapters is one in which the European Union’s emphasis on multilateralism and pooled sovereignty contrasts with the multipolar visions held by China and the United States.

The second part of the volume looks at bilateral ties within the US–China–EU triangle. The section is opened by three chapters on German, British and French relations with China, authored respectively by Gudrun Wacker, James Gow and Jean-Pierre Cabestan. The editors warn against “the dangers of treating the European Union as a single actor”, but in fact the absence of a chapter on the relationship between China and the European Union as a whole is somewhat surprising, especially considering that the relevance of the EU dimension for national China policies is amply recognised by all these authors. Member states are still key players in EU-China relations, and in this sense the wealth of details provided by these three chapters is certainly welcome, but the book could have provided a better picture by integrating them with an essay on the EU’s China policy. This section also includes a chapter by Robert Sutter on US–China relations which outlines the potential for cooperation and conflict between the two countries, highlighting the role of American public opinion; and a chapter by Wu Baiyi on Chinese views of the United States and Europe, providing an interesting discussion of the “sources of Chinese cognition” on issues ranging from the 2008 financial crisis to the value-oriented diplomacy pursued by the West.

The following section consists of two chapters presenting Chinese and Western views on the triangular relationship. Wang Yizhou is the author of a rather diverse and comprehensive chapter on China’s relations with the West, widening the analysis to cover the implications for US–China–EU relations of the roles played by other actors, such as the Islamic world, Russia and the rest of the BRICs. Rosemary Foot compares EU and US approaches to China, focusing specifically on different conceptions of world order and on the way China perceives its two interlocutors, and providing a brief case study on Western attempts to influence China’s nuclear non-proliferation policies.

The two chapters in Part four set out to investigate the role played by China in the transatlantic relationship. Andrew Walter analyses the macroeconomic and currency policies pursued by the United States, Europe and China, and how they affect global economic imbalances. His chapter highlights how US-China currency dynamics have damaged the eurozone and widened Europe’s trade deficit, and it shows how the financial crisis has increased the mutual dependence between the United States and China. Finally, Bates Gill discusses differences between EU and US approaches to security issues in their relations with China, advocating a strengthening of transatlantic, as well as trilateral, cooperation.

As noted by Wang, “the relationship between China, the United States and the European Union is not an equilateral triangle”. In fact, despite the graphic appeal of the notion of a diplomatic triangle, the reader can easily have the impression that the main focus of the book is on two separate bilateral relations: between China and the US on the one hand, and between China and the EU on the other. This is quite understandable, considering how much closer the United States and Europe are to each other than they are to China, however it does detract a little from the main argument of the book. Furthermore, while the wide range of topics covered in the volume is certainly commendable, its structure and the way the chapters would fit within a unified framework are not always self-explanatory. In spite of these minor shortcomings, the book is certainly thought-provoking and it provides a considerable wealth of information. It should be wholeheartedly recommended to anyone interested in US–China–EU relations, and indeed in the future of world order.